

THE THURGOOD MARSHALL LAW LIBRARY—SILENT NO LONGER



This view of the new law school building features the law library façade as well as Westminster Hall.

A LIBRARY WAS ONCE A BASTION OF SILENCE. The loudest noises came from someone rifling through card catalog drawers or the chattering of students working on a project. The latter offense almost guaranteed an icy stare from the librarian whose main duties were to check books in and out, help patrons locate research materials among the stacks, and fill out paperwork to borrow materials from other libraries as needed.

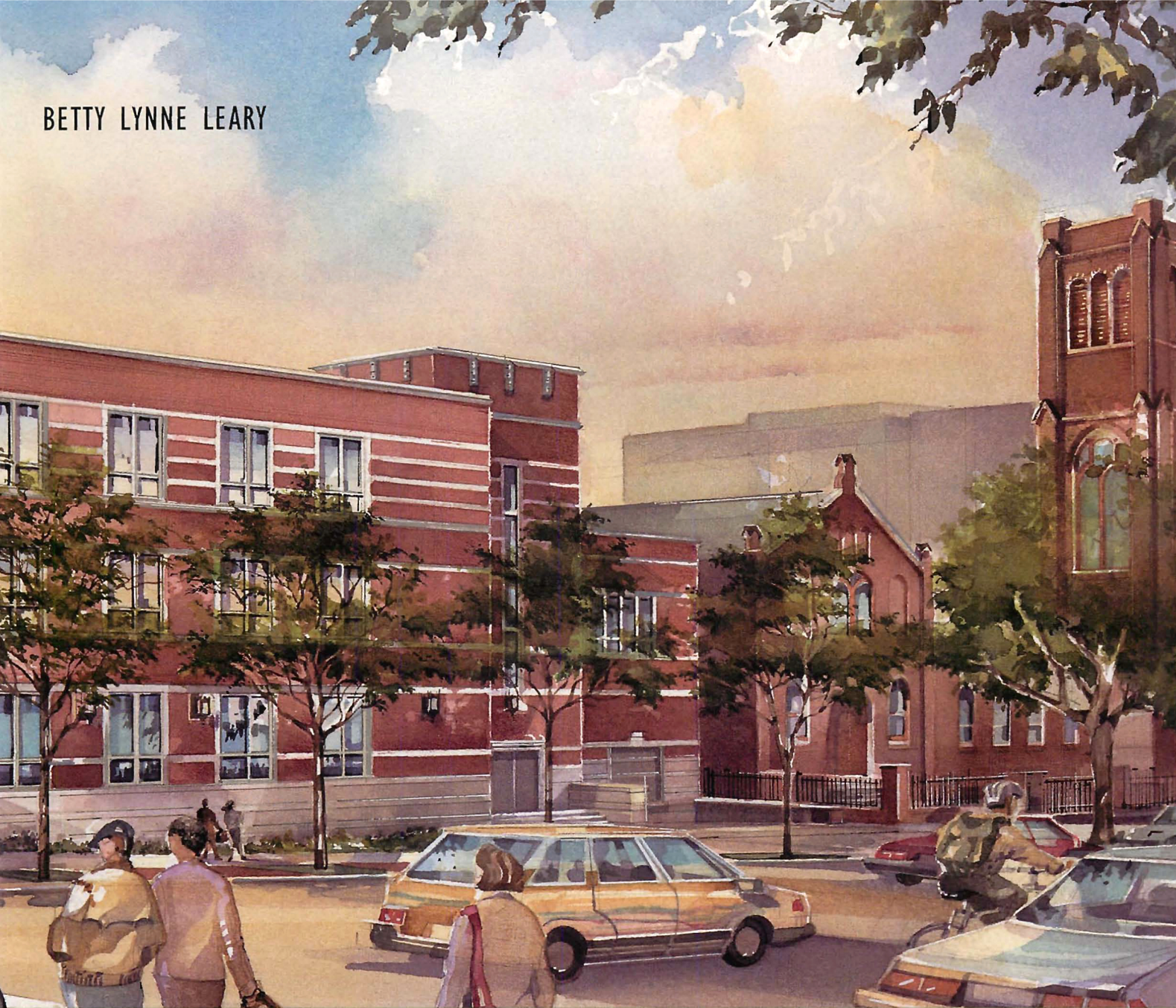
Libraries aren't quiet places anymore. With the advent of technology that makes it possible to access materials from around the world in an instant, libraries have become learning centers and yes, even social centers, and that suits Barbara Gontrum just fine.

"It's important that the library be seen as a vibrant place," Gontrum says. In her 20 years as director of the Thurgood Marshall Law Library, Gontrum has seen a shift in how students and faculty use and even behave in a library.

"There's more of an interdisciplinary approach to research, a more collaborative effort," she explains. With very little slamming of card catalog drawers these days, noise now emanates from fingers flying over computer keyboards and study groups gathered in lounge areas specially designed for collaborative work. Computers are found on both sides of the desk as librarians have been transformed from hush masters to Web masters.

"There are lots of opportunities right now for librarians," Gontrum explains. "There's so much information out there it can be hard for users to navigate through it all." Library professionals must continue to identify and organize information, but their domain now includes countless electronic resources in addition to the printed word.

"Books are still being printed although some people still find that hard to believe," Gontrum laughs. "The challenge is to do



what we've always done and add other skills such as working with the electronics projects."

The explosion of electronic sources from even a decade ago means Gontrum and her staff of 25, which includes 10 library professionals, must keep abreast of much more than Lexis and Westlaw, the two best-known research systems available to lawyers.

"There are lots of other databases now, and lawyers need access to information in other disciplines too, not just legal," she says.

Although the wealth of information may seem like a gold mine to attorneys and students alike, it comes at a price. Licensing agreements on electronic sources tend to limit users to students and faculty, Gontrum explains. "We often have to choose between having a print source that can be loaned out to anyone or the electronic source which can be accessed by students and faculty only. Our funding is more important now for that particular reason."

The law library doors are open to everyone and many local attorneys, along with average citizens, take full advantage of all the library offers. As the largest academic law library in the state, the librarians handle a significant amount of work for state agencies.

"We have a large interlibrary loan program along with the standard reference services," Gontrum notes. "We also offer photocopy and rush services, which attorneys use most heavily because they always need everything at the last minute."

John Catizone '96, an attorney with St. Paul Insurance Co. in Baltimore, uses the library for the research capabilities beyond what he has available in his office.

"I research some of the regional digests, treatises, restatements and the Maryland Digest as well," he says. "The library is quite handy." Many people handling their own divorces or other legal problems look for guidance among the stacks while others with their own attorneys simply want to do a little reading on their own.

While waiting for its new home to arise on West Baltimore Street, the library occupies the old Health Sciences Library building on the corner of Lombard and Greene streets. The staff still offers full services although some of the collection is housed in compact shelving in the basement and is accessed through retrieval services.

Gontrum looks forward to the more thoughtfully designed spaces the staff and patrons will enjoy once the new building is completed in 2002.

"We needed more collection space of course, but the main thing we lacked was room for collaborative study," she says. "Students really wanted more group study rooms." The Reserve Collection, once stored behind the desk where few people could find it, will move to an open area to provide improved access for all users.

The Grand Reading Room, perhaps the most architecturally significant space, promises to be grand indeed covering two floors on the Paca Street side of the building.

"We've already made huge transitions to electronics and we've done a lot of research to do that well," Gontrum says. Instead of placing electrical outlets on the floor where people tend to kick or step on them, every table will have a lamp. "Data power will be supplied in the base of the lamps which will blend the traditional look of a library with state-of-the-art technology."

And along with all the data terminals and group study areas, Gontrum assures her patrons that there will indeed be areas where a harried student or faculty member can find some peace and quiet to work. Peace and quiet was often a rare commodity in the old building. Pedestrian traffic following a circuitous route to Westminster Hall wandered through the library while the staff taught research classes in the middle of the room. Blueprints of the new library show not only a new, separate entrance to Westminster Hall but a research classroom where Gontrum's staff will conduct workshops in print and electronic research techniques without disturbing other library users.

"Research skills are so critical to law students these days because the mass of information makes research more difficult," Gontrum says, adding that the library also offers courses in advanced research and in advanced research and writing, both of which are popular with students.

Law students seem very aware that the employment environment has changed right along with technology over the last decade. With much less on-the-job training plus the significant costs of conducting research, students must be well-prepared to hit the ground running and know how to use technology quickly and efficiently.

"I think we're working toward preparing our students," Gontrum says. "The law school is committed to having students who write well and research effectively." As a high-tech learning center armed to the walls with electronic and print resources, the new library will help propel Maryland students in the right direction.



The new law building's Technology and Learning Center

A Web of Legal Legacy

Exploring the history of the man who created the Maryland Law Institute, the law school's precursor, once meant poring over dusty books and biographical papers in the law library's special collection. Today, however, the special collections materials and rare books that detail David Hoffman's influence on early legal education is just a click away.

By accessing the Web site at www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/hoffman, visitors find a wealth of information complete with historical photographs that detail the work of the man described as an aggressive thinker with novel approaches to legal education.

"Hoffman's sense was that law was interdisciplinary," explains Bill Sleeman, bibliographic control and government documents

librarian. "The law school stresses that now but back in the early 1800s, it was a very unique perspective."

Hoffman envisioned a legal system that would include a wide range of disciplines such as civil justice, social work, moral philosophy, history, economics and literature. Although Hoffman kept no journal and had few personal papers, he was a voluminous writer and the collection includes a variety of his materials including book reviews and legal writings.

"Hoffman is often overlooked as a developer of legal education both in Maryland and in the United States," Sleeman says, adding that Hoffman began the Law Institute in 1812-1813. The actual date is debated among authorities, Sleeman notes, as the school was funded by a lottery, the date of which differs from other suggested dates.

The Web site, written and developed by Sleeman with technical assistance from electronic services librarian Kim Morris, features a short introduction on Hoffman and includes a time line of bibliographical and historical events beginning with Hoffman's birth on Christmas Eve, 1784, and continuing to his death in New York at the age of 70. Visitors to the site can also access a complete list of Hoffman's publications that are available at the library, read the first lecture Hoffman presented to students at the Maryland Law Institute in 1823, and review an outline of his active political career.

Sleeman concludes the site with a tribute to Hoffman's lasting influence and a copy of Hoffman's obituary from the *Baltimore Sun* dated Nov. 13, 1854.

"The exciting part is being able to digitize the historical information and make it available to people everywhere," says Barbara Gontrum, director of the law library. Sleeman agrees noting, "You can't just have a rare book collection that sits around. You have to use today's technology to promote, preserve and share those resources."

David Hoffman Web site:
www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/hoffman